

Ken Nobis, Michigan Milk Producers Association
Testimony Regarding H.B. 4503-H.B. 4507
House Agriculture Committee
May 4, 2011

My name is Ken Nobis, I am a dairy farmer from St. Johns, Michigan and serve as President of Michigan Milk Producers Association. MMPA is milk marketing cooperative owned and controlled by over 2,100 dairy farmers in Michigan and surrounding states. The dairy industry is Michigan's largest agriculture commodity contributing approximately \$6 billion to our state's economy on an annual basis and nearly 25% of agriculture's cash receipts. The dairy industry is a growing industry in our state in both production and processing capacity. Demand for dairy products is increasing, particularly in the export market. Michigan is well positioned to be an even bigger player in the export market, creating more jobs and contributing more to our state's economy. As we have seen production and manufacturing jobs sent overseas, this is an opportunity for Michigan to be a leader and bring some of that revenue back to Michigan in the form of jobs and product sales. This is our main reason for our organization's opposition to House Bills 4503-4507. Feral swine – and the extensive destruction and diseases they spread – threaten jobs and opportunities for Michigan's dairy industry.

The potential negative implications to Michigan's entire dairy and agriculture industry far outweigh any reason why we would want to try and regulate an invasive species. Wild hogs escaping from hunt clubs is how the problem began in our state and we must now take action to ban and eradicate these wild hogs before they do further damage to Michigan agriculture. The USDA and virtually every state have declared these animals as invasive species. And make no doubt about it, these animals are an invasive species. All evidence points to the destruction these animals cause and the diseases they spread. Why would you want to jeopardize our state's second leading industry by trying to regulate an invasive species? As a state, our policy should be to ban invasive species.

Three years ago, a resolution on feral swine was submitted to MMPA's resolutions committee for consideration. At first, there were some who may have questioned why MMPA would want to have a position statement on feral swine. After all, what impact could pigs have on the dairy industry? As we have found, feral swine pose a very serious threat to our industry and the livelihoods of over 2,000 dairy farm families and tens of thousands of jobs.

The resolution that was introduced three years ago was amended and unanimously approved at our State Annual Delegate meeting in March of this year. It is very clear where MMPA members stand on this issue. It states:

“Many farmers and rural residents are very concerned about the increasing population of feral hogs and other destructive wild animals. We need to have every tool or means available to help control these animals. We strongly support the order signed by former Department of Natural Resources and Environment Director Rebecca Humphries that declares wild hogs an invasive species effective July 8, 2011. We urge that the order go into effect without delay.”

Wild feral hogs are known vectors of diseases, particularly bovine tuberculosis, which is a serious threat to Michigan’s dairy industry. Our state has spent a tremendous amount of time and resources to control and eradicate bovine TB. Since 1998, the Michigan Department of Agriculture alone has spent over \$77million to combat Bovine TB. That amount does not include what has been spent by the USDA, Department of Natural Resources and other state departments. Our organization and many of our members have spent a lot of time and resources dealing with the impact of Bovine TB.

Our field staff has been working with members in northeastern Michigan to develop wildlife risk mitigation plans to protect their farm. While the occurrence of Bovine TB has decreased since 1998, the fact remains, Bovine TB continues to be a serious threat to our industry. I was reminded of that Monday evening when I received a call from one of our members who is deeply concerned about the recent case of Bovine TB found in a beef herd near his farm. Our state must do what it can to diminish the spread of Bovine TB. Trying to regulate wild hogs will add one more vector of Bovine TB, it rolls out the red carpet for wild hogs and puts our industry in jeopardy. It is difficult to understand why you would put at risk the strides we have made in Bovine TB eradication by trying to regulate an animal that simply cannot be regulated. It only takes one escape to devastate our industry.

In addition to the diseases these animals are known to spread and the destruction they cause, regulations of swine hunt clubs will cost Michigan taxpayers. In the Governor's proposed budget, he recommends the elimination of funding for the dairy inspection program. At a time when we are cutting critical programs such as the dairy inspection program designed to protect food safety, I ask why we would consider passing legislation that would increase costs to the taxpayers of Michigan? As was indicated in an

independent House Fiscal Agency analysis, regulatory monitoring of deer and elk hunting facilities in Michigan – including monitoring for diseases – cost more than \$1.3 million in 2009, while fees for such facilities only generated only about \$106,000. In addition to not covering the true cost of regulation, if disease erupts, Michigan taxpayers will be forced to pay the indemnification of the swine and of any livestock or dairy cattle that become infected. If our state can't fund a food safety program such as the dairy inspection program, how can Michigan taxpayers pay for the increased costs that this legislation would create?

The best and most effective way of tackling the threat of wild hogs to Michigan's economy is to ban these invasive species from our state. We urge you to allow Invasive Species Order No. 1 of 2010 to take effect on July 8, 2011. It is the best choice to allow Michigan's vibrant dairy industry to continue to grow and contribute to our state's economy. I appreciate the opportunity to express our organization's concerns with these bills.

At this time, I would like to introduce MMPA member Dan Fisk, who will give you his first hand experience dealing with wild feral hogs at his farm. Dan belongs to the local which submitted the original feral swine resolution to our Resolutions Committee.

